

AUGUST HILDEBRAND
HIS CAREER FROM BOYHOOD
50th ANNIVERSARY

Long years ago a boy of fourteen years left his birthplace, his home in the old world, to come to America, the land of opportunity.

The date was 1883. He had heard much of the state of Oregon and of the sea port town of Astoria. His elder sister had married Martin Foard, one of that town's substantial merchants.

He was sturdy, strong, gave promise of becoming a large well-built man, the years fulfilled that promise. Likely he had never read the uplift books of Horatio Alger or Heuty's books for boys, on which literary fare the growing boys of the middle west and western states were mentally nourished and their ideals formed. He had not read them, but he proceeded to live them, from his first year in America. It is a pity that that successful author Horatio Alger could not have watched his progress as he went up step by step, to manhood as a highly respected merchant. He would surely have used him as the hero of one of his books. "Pluck and Luck" perhaps.

There was an element of luck in certain angles of these formative years; August Hildebrand himself agrees. For instance he came to our beautiful northwest country to his sister's pleasant home and his brother-in-law was a partner in an established and successful business; the pioneer firm of Foard and Stokes, a household word of the Astorians of the eighties and nineties, as were Cooper's Dry Goods, Fisher Brothers Hardware, Van Dusen's Insurance and a few others.

Not long after he began to work at Foard and Stokes, there occurred one of those devastating fires from which our town had suffered more than once. Wooden building, wooden side-walks and street, often strong winds from the river, they were almost inevitable. The store and contents were wiped out, like many others up and down the business streets. With the marvelous grit and optimism our men of business showed through this and later fires, the store was as soon as possible rebuilt and better than before. Was it then or after a later holocaust that our hero made a momentous remark, "Everything was destroyed except our will to survive"?

But meantime August got a job for the summer on one of the small coastal schooners, carrying freight between Astoria and other Oregon Coast Ports to pay the debt which he had set his mind on repaying as soon as humanly possible. It was not from love of the sea, as some boys have, he just wanted to be busy and earn what money he could quickly.

In 1888 he made an important decision, he felt he needed technical training in office work, for always ahead of him was his goal of a store, a business of his own, and he went to San Francisco and spent the winter at Heald's Business College.

He was employed at Foard and Stokes until 1902, when he got a job with a Portland firm, Mitchell, Lewis and Staver, a pioneer firm which manufactured farm wagons, buggies, and other horse drawn vehicles.

But not all of August Hildebrand's mind and energy was taken up in getting ahead in life, no, he had not neglected his opportunities in the social, the gentler side of a young man's life. There were delightful social gatherings amongst the young people in Astoria in those days. "Believe it or not" without the benefit of autos, radios, television, cocktails, or even the telephones, there were delightful parties where "boy meets girl" in a time honored and romantic manner. Just so August Hildebrand met charming Catherine Christians; they fell in love in good old story book fashion and so this young couple were married in 1893. I am sorely tempted to add "and lived happily ever after", for this was a good marriage.

There is a good old-fashioned word "help-mate", which applies well to Mrs. Hildebrand and she has "gone along with him all the way". There is a real community of interest. They are both interested in the Clatsop County Historical Society, and attend the meetings together. They have

been faithful helpers with the restoration of the old Flavel Mansion and its use as a museum and meeting place for the Society. Many other mutual interests. Two children, both sons, have been born to them, and their father counts on their help as they have grown to manhood, one of the assets for which he is grateful.

From the time they were married in 1893 until the present, they have lived in their pleasant ample home with its splendid river view and attractive garden. Mrs. Hildebrand, Kate, as her friends love to call her, is a fine housekeeper and homemaker, the kind of hospitable hostess who makes it a real pleasure to be entertained in that comfortable spacious home. Hard to believe with her trimness and good looks that she is the great grandmother of three.

In 1903, Mr. Hildebrand went into the furniture line with J.J. Robinson and also that year, he, with Mr. E.A. Gerding, John Fry and J. Bartoldus, formed the Astoria Crushed Rock Co.

Now we come to an important date:

February 1st, 1905--

Mr. August Hildebrand established his own business at the 465 Commercial Street location where they have carried on for fifty years. Some record. From that date until 1912 when he bought the building and the fifty by a hundred lot he had been renting from the Flavel estate.

The fact that in the down town part of Astoria, the streets and building were built on piling over the river when the tide was in, which made it different from other towns, water flowed under the streets and side-walks, when the tide was out a condition described as mud flats existed, neither artistic nor sweet smelling. Pioneers ignored it, in fact, scarcely noticed it, visitors sometimes unkindly commented. However, our Columbia was useful as well as beautiful, in that old refuse, dust, etc. was swept into the water, and when the tide went out, all unwanted debris went with it, a unique system, sometimes lamented by the "old guard" used to the easier way.

A business run with intelligence and industry, with good will towards all fellow workers is bound to be successful and the Hildebrand Furniture Company was surely that.

The year of 1914 was a prosperous year for the Business, the Seawall Furniture Company was acquired, a warehouse built at 10th and Duane much needed to store the acquired stock, an outstanding change and modern note, the first delivery truck, a Ford, was bought from the Lovell Auto Co., and one might say a new era began.

One of Mr. Hildebrand's strokes of business shrewdness was shown when he bought out the stock of the B.W. Strong Furniture Co.. He moved it all to Astoria by railroad freight. It was a wise move this 1918--and there were shortages of all kinds due to war conditions, which the stock filled in finely.

One of Mr. Hildebrand's most likeable traits is his loyalty and affection for all those who worked with him no matter in what capacity. Not one has been forgotten by him. He speaks with special affection of those early friends and helper, Wilder Parker and Elling Olsen.

He loves to talk of the days when he had one horse drawn delivery wagon and the black horse "Nig" who drew it, he has several amusing and nostalgic stories about that well remembered animal.

Those were good days and a more serene and settled world. It was something to be grateful for, to have the young years before that unsettling First World War, after which the world has never been the same.

---Polly McKeon Bell